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ABSTRACT

This paper is designed to initiate discussion about new educational accountability systems and the implications of these systems for educator preparation. Accountability systems are often developed with little regard to a clear definition of accountability, but once the systems are in place, and states are showing (realistic or political) progress, policymakers move to improve the component parts. One way to improve educational output is the implementation of accountability systems that focus attention on the improvement of educational programs. There appears to be a national movement to tie performance assessment to state accreditation as part of an accountability system for teacher preparation programs. Because of the lack of viable alternatives to standardized testing, policymakers are likely to continue to rely on the use of standardized tests in accountability. The educator accountability system in Texas is one of the first, and it relies on a written examination, the Examination for the Certification of Educators in Texas. Challenges to the Texas system are noted. Another trend seen in accountability systems is towards tying them to student performance. Because the accountability systems are new, data that indicate the effectiveness or impact of these systems are lacking. Policymakers may be faced with decisions that maintain an adequate supply of teachers at the expense of an effective accountability system. (Contains 35 references.) (SLD)

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Running Head: ACCOUNTABILITY IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Accountability in Teacher Education: Systems and Trends

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ACCOUNTABILITY IN TEACHER EDUCATION: SYSTEMS AND TRENDS

Policymakers and educators across the nation have become enamored with holding governmental institutions accountable[1] through performance-based accreditation (Selingo, 1999; Zumeta, 1999; Ashworth, 1994). Elmore, Abelman, & Fuhrman (1996) refer to this evolving system of accountability as "the new educational accountability," and they cite the three major components of this system as 1) student measurement as the primary indicator of performance, 2) a system of standards, and 3) a system of rewards and punishments.

Although the push to hold institutions accountable had its genesis in public education, it has now migrated into higher education (Basinger, 1999). Zumeta (1998) notes that the public trust of colleges and universities has waned, and as a result the public demands that these institutions become more accountable. Carnevale, Johnson, and Edwards (1998) report that over three-fourths of all states now use performance measures in the process of higher education policy making. In an effort to continue the movement toward greater accountability, it is expected that within 5 years more than one-half of the states will tie performance measures to the funding of institutions of higher education.

Due in part to the political attractiveness of reforming or improving education, many of the new accountability initiatives in higher education began with educator preparation programs (Bradley, 2000; Sack and Robelen, 2000). The focus of this paper is to initiate discussion regarding the new accountability systems and the implications of the birth of these systems on educator preparation.

Development of Educational of Policy

As is typical with social policy development, accountability systems are often developed with little regard to a clear definition of accountability (Ouston & Fidler, 1998), and seldom in a systematic manner. Feintuck (1994) notes that educational policy is often developed "in a piecemeal and haphazard manner, influenced more by the fluctuating, uncertain and essentially hidden relationship[s]" (p. 35). The manner in which policy issues are conceptualized, and the subsequent policy developed are often defined by how those issues are "proposed and packaged" (Hess, 1999).

Kennedy (1999) describes the policy making process in the following manner:

> [P]olicy decisions rarely involve selecting among clearly defined alternatives, all of which are aimed at solving a clearly defined problem. Instead, policy makers often must struggle to determine what the problem actually is, must negotiate among multiple and conflicting goals, and must devise compromise actions that adjust existing policies at the margins rather than making radical changes. (p. 56)

Howlett and Ramesh (1998) offer that policy change occurs in a variety of patterns. One pattern, the typical policy making process, focuses on establishing new policy by incrementally modifying existing policy. A second pattern is more "dramatic," and it is associated with turbulent periods of change. "Paradigmatic change is seen as

involving periods of stability and incremental adaptations interspersed by periods of revolutionary upheaval" (p. 471).

While the normal policy making change process is easily seen as the slowest form of change, it is often identified by having the same set of policy making actors involved over an extended period of time. Paradigmatic change, on the other hand, can be either fast or slow, but is more commonly associated with rapid change "precipitated by innovative individuals" wanting to make their political mark on the world (Howlett and Ramesh, 1998).

Due to the increased political nature of education (aligned with the political needs of policy makers to act in a rapid fashion), the shift to the new accountability system can be described as paradigmatic. However, as more information is obtained about the effects of the accountability system, the change will likely become incremental and the system fine-tuned.

Once the accountability systems are in place and states are showing (realistic or political) progress, policy makers logically move to improve the component parts. A simple explanation of this process may best be described in an input-process-output model as illustrated in the model below.[2] In order to increase or improve the output (student performance), it is necessary to increase or improve (or "tweak") the input or process.

State-level Educational Policy Making

Input	*Processes*	*Output*
Students (and their physical, mental, emotional, & social welfare)	Educational Programs	Educated Citizenry (student performance as identified by educational leaders & policy makers)

Quality
Accountability Controls
Social Welfare Programs

Although improving inputs, i.e., social welfare of students, would be the natural selection when attempting to improve the output, social welfare programs do not appear to be the political choice (Sack, 2000). Elmore et al. (1996) are quick to point out that "decisions about accountability are intensely political" (p. 85). Policy makers receive greater political benefit from choosing the most visible alternative which will gain broader acceptance (Hess, 1999). However, continuing to improve the process, i.e., the quality of teaching and teachers, is very politically attractive (Cohen, 1986).

Developing Trend in Accountability

Because of the apparent policy making ties, one will find difficulty discussing accountability in teacher education without some discussion of its predecessor, accountability in public education. Accountability in public education was sporadic at best prior to the 1970's when the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was employed to track student performance. However, since that time both state and federal politicians have chosen to use accountability as the primary means to reform education (Cibulka, 1999). Most notably, the National Commission on Excellence in Education established by Education Secretary Terrell Bell stimulated politicians and lay persons to critically assess public education (Texas Education Agency, 1996). Moller-Wong, Shelley, and Ebbers (1999) propose that

> "[a]ccountability of efforts at school reform are imperative because of pressures from both elites and citizens to ensure that increased spending has an impact on the quality of the education system. It is widely felt that American education fails to serve either students' or their parents' interests adequately. (253)

Elmore et al. (1996) note that a 1993 study by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education found that "at least forty-three states claimed that they were revising or expecting to change their accountability systems to focus more on performance" (p. 66). Furthermore, the authors note that "most new accreditation approaches rest on state-determined performance standards or benchmarks of adequate progress" (p. 66).

The recent publication of *Quality Counts2000* indicates that 48 states are currently administering a statewide testing program of public school students; a considerable increase from the 38 states reporting similar programs only 3 years earlier (Jerald, 2000). (*Quality Counts 2000* reports that five states – Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, and Utah – had new legislation on accountability introduced in 1999 [p. 63].) And as assessment programs come on-line, state policymakers are introducing legislation to utilize the scores from assessment in accountability systems.

Accountability in Educator Preparation

An alternate option for improving the output is the implementation of accountability systems that focus attention on the improvement of educational programs. What policy makers want from the accountability systems is quite clear. John McCain cogently points out "Just as we must have high standards for our students, we must have high standards for our educators, because for every one teacher who can't teach, there will be hundreds of children who won't learn" (Sack, 2000, p. 29).

Attempts to improve education are not new to public or higher education. Even though most of the recent media attention has been given to public school initiatives, higher education has been focusing on improvement initiatives for some time. Self regulatory accountability in teacher education had its genesis with organizations such as the National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), who began with the development of standards and a voluntary adherence to the standards. Today, many policy makers and educational leaders fail to view voluntary adherence to NCATE

standards as true accountability (See Watts, 1988). In fact, education critics have blamed the "morass of rules" required to meet standards as discouraging to those interested in entering the teaching profession (Bradley, 2000). Considerable discussion and dissatisfaction with the self-regulation process has led to an exodus from NCATE by many institutions.

There appears to be a national movement to tie performance assessment to state accreditation as part of an accountability system for teacher preparation programs (Bradley, 2000; Riley, 1999; Texas Education Agency, 1996; Fuhrman and Elmore, 1995), which is a change from the self-regulation system to a state-imposed regulatory system. A number of issues arise out of this movement, not the least of which is identifying what performance to assess. Initially, it appears that performance on standardized written examinations such as Praxis serves as the basis of the "new" accountability movement. Passing a test prior to entering the teaching profession is required by forty-one states (Bradley, 2000).

Accountability Measures

Cohen (1996) notes that "accountability often turns out to be less clear and more complex than it seems to be in theory" (p. 27). This is due, largely, to determining those things to which someone or some institution should be held accountable. The process of identifying key indicators of improved performance continues, concurrent with the implementation of accountability systems based on performance[3], (Carnevale, 1998; Evans, 1999; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999; Zumeta, 1999; Elliot, 1996; Council of Chief State School Officers, 1995). States such as Texas and Massachusetts utilize licensing examinations to judge teacher preparation programs, and other states are investigating similar systems (Lively, 1998). Although there is not a consensus that these methods determine teacher quality (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999), such practices continue to be advocated by policy makers who have little empirical evidence to support or refute the practices (Madaus, 1985).[4] The fact that standardized testing can produce questionable results has been known for some time (Coffman, 1993; Madaus, 1985), yet educators have provided few acceptable alternatives (See Resnick & Resnick, 1992). Alexander (2000) notes that "the educational community does not have the comprehensive models and theories of academic development needed to frame sound alternatives" (p. 28).

Linn (2000) notes that testing is attractive to policy makers for four specific reasons. First, testing is cost efficient. Second, policy makers can easily require testing whereas causing change within the classroom (or program) is considerably more difficult. Third, testing is time-efficient. Because elected officials (policy makers) typically have a relatively short term (3 – 5 years) in which to make a significant, visible impact, this reason is particularly important.

And, finally, Linn notes that the "results are visible" (p. 4). This, too, is a significant factor for elected policy makers who desire that "the resulting overly rosey picture that is painted by short-term gains observed in most new testing programs gives the impression of improvement right on schedule for the next election" (p. 4).

The professional preparation of educators is seen as fundamental to the improvement of elementary and secondary education (National Commission on Teaching

and America's Future, 1996). Therefore, a logical method for improving student performance is improving the quality of teachers in the classroom.

Absent viable alternatives to standardized testing, it is likely that policy makers will continue to rely on the use of standardized tests. As states begin to develop accountability programs, universities must prepare to aggressively address the demands of the politically popular accountability systems, which include testing. These systems, in general, avoid holding institutions accountable for bureaucratic requirements such as faculty work load and degrees, semester credit hour requirements, and content requirements (Elmore et al., 1996). Instead, the systems focus on performance indicators such as basic skills examinations and certification examinations.

The Texas Educator Accountability System

Discussing the new accountability provisions, Bradley (2000) notes that "In 1998, Texas became the first state to hold colleges and universities accountable for their education students' scores on the state's licensure tests. Five other states told *Education Week* they are following suit" (p. 26).

Observing the inevitable trend toward strict accountability programs, deans of colleges of education in Texas initiated an accountability system for educator preparation programs in the early 1990's. Accreditation that was previously based on compliance with state mandates and rules shifted to accreditation based on test results. Institutions that were granted a low-performing status based upon scores on the state's teacher licensing examinations in content and pedagogy became subject to site-visits from the state and received peer assistance from the Educator Preparation Improvement Initiative (EPII). The Texas Commissioner of Public Education subsidized the funding for EPII coordinators and trainers, and EPII teams were composed primarily of public school and university personnel. Penalties, or restrictions, were never imposed upon the low-performing institutions, which usually viewed the EPII visit as nothing more than a slap on the hand.

In 1995, the Texas Legislature engaged in a comprehensive revision of the public education code. As a result, numerous changes were made to the state governance structure of educator preparation and certification. Following the lead of several other states, educator certification was removed from the state education agency and placed under the governance of a new state agency whose board consisted not of elected officials, but of gubernatorial-appointed education and business professionals.

Driven by state statute, the Texas State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) was directed to establish "standards to govern the approval and continuing accountability of all educator preparation programs based on information that is disaggregated with respect to sex and ethnicity and that includes (1) results of the certification examinations … and (2) performance based on the appraisal system for beginning teachers adopted by the board" (Texas Education Code, § 21.045). The statute also requires the SBEC to annually review each program and provide sanctions to those institutions not meeting minimum standards:

> The executive director of the board shall appoint an oversight team of educators to make recommendations and provide assistance to educator preparation

> programs that do not meet accreditation standards. If, after one year, an educator preparation program has not fulfilled the recommendations of the oversight team, the executive director shall appoint a person to administer and manage the operations of the program. If the program does not improve after two years, the board shall revoke the approval of the program to prepare educators for state certification. (Texas Education Code, § 21.045 [d])

Texas utilizes a regionally developed and administered written examination, the Examination for the Certification of Educators in Texas (ExCET), as the basis of the new Accountability System for Educator Preparation (ASEP). The SBEC plans to add an assessment of actual teaching performance by 2003, and pilot programs related to such assessment have been initiated. However, the large number of teachers (over 250,000) and diversity of the state may well require the SBEC to re-think its ambitious timeline.

From the perspective of state policy makers, the heart of the accountability system is contained in the strong motivation for educator preparation programs to improve the performance of individuals on the certification exams and in actual teaching. The politically attractive process of holding programs to high standards becomes a politically sensitive practice when preparation programs are shut down (See Cohen, 1998; Elmore et al., 1996). The sensitivity becomes more acute when the program being eliminated is a producer of a large number of teachers and/or a large number of minority teachers. Facing an acute shortage of teachers, alleviating a critical shortage of teachers in Texas is another political objective of major consequence for the state's policy makers.

Challenges to the Texas System

Texas education deans met the challenges afforded by the ASEP with an adventurous spirit. Undoubtedly, the series of events comprising the history of accreditation and accountability laid the foundation for a new era of cooperation among institutions preparing teachers. That is not to say, however, that critics of the accountability system do not exist. Opponents of the ASEP who oppose using student performance as a sole or primary means of holding teacher preparation programs accountable typically offer two arguments. The primary argument is predicated on the concept of academic freedom afforded to university faculty. By establishing standards and measuring those standards through a high stakes testing program, in effect the state is dictating the content taught in the university class. A second point of contention regards the inability of the university to control the performance of the teacher preparation graduates once they enter the public school classroom. Without control of the environment in which candidates begin their teaching, the university faculty subsequently has little control of the graduate's performance in a classroom context. Yet, institutional accreditation depends, at least in part, on the performance of graduates in the public school classroom.

Proponents of ASEP counter very simply that standards without accountability essentially result in having no established standards. (And they often cite the aforementioned lack of enforcement for poor performance as an example.) Furthermore, they contend that the state is not directing the content of any class nor the manner in which it is to be taught. The state is merely establishing a minimal expectation

concerning what graduates from teacher preparation programs must know and be able to do once the teacher preparation program is completed. By doing such, the state is performing its stewardship role of ensuring that public funds have been spent in a worthwhile manner, and that individuals admitted to practice have met minimum standards.

A major issue surrounding the use of examination pass rates involves the relatively high failure rate of minority test takers (State Board for Educator Certification, 1998). Their failure rate is greater than the failure rate of non-minority test takers, and ASEP opponents contend that the state's certification examination is biased against minority test takers, resulting in unfavorable ratings of teacher preparation programs with greater percentages of minority students. Other legal issues that may arise from the certification examinations are 1) the arbitrary nature of the selection of test questions, 2) statistical and conceptual validity of the test, and 3) the job relevance of the test.

Using the same data, proponents of the ASEP point to teacher preparation programs that have a high percentage of minorities who pass the state's certification examination at an acceptable rate. In effect, they contend the certification examination is not biased, but certain individual preparation programs are not meeting the needs of the minority students. The purpose of the exams is not to predict success in the classroom, but to ensure that all candidates for certification, regardless of ethnicity or sex meet minimum entrance level competencies.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) has indicated that institutions should close or improve degree and certificate programs that do not meet performance standards established by the state (Burkhalter, 1998). Because the accreditation process targets specific programs, an institution could possibly lose its authority to certify teachers in a particular subject (e.g., English, mathematics, or agricultural science) while others across the university remain intact. ASEP opponents are quick to offer that due to the current system, colleges of education can *hold hostage* other departments and colleges in the university.[5] If the college of education fails to meet established standards, then the entire university is effectively penalized.

ASEP proponents counter on two levels. First, there is no longer an undergraduate degree in education, a concept that was initiated by the legislature and overtly and tacitly supported by faculty outside the colleges of education. As a result, those with the authority of awarding degrees with accompanying certification must, likewise, accept the responsibility. Furthermore, the initial data indicate that poor certification examination performance is found primarily in the disciplines of the social sciences, mathematics, and English as well as early childhood programs. The proponents argue that the arts and sciences are not fulfilling their responsibilities for preparing teachers and are holding the university hostage by placing the university accreditation in jeopardy.

Implications

As was stated earlier, policy making is not a clean process. Policy making is often affected by hidden agendas and political maneuvering. Still it would be unwise to ignore the trend toward states implementing accountability systems based upon student performance.[6] Lessons from the Texas experience also reveal unique challenges for

educator preparation programs due to the transformation from the self-regulating system to the state-imposed regulating system.

Given the political attractiveness of the drive toward accountability, it is inevitable that a successful accountability system for educator preparation will contribute to a more comprehensive accountability system for all entities involved, including public higher education institutions. The accountability system is likely to produce a series of administrative and operational changes specific to educator preparation programs. First, it is probable that funding will be increased to assist programs that fail to meet accreditation standards, or failing programs may be eliminated, allowing funds to be redirected to other university programs.[7] Second, educator preparation in institutions of higher education will unquestionably receive greater scrutiny. Finally, the curriculum of educator preparation programs will be realigned with the content of state-mandated standards and assessments.

Although state regulatory bodies (policy makers/enforcers) often attempt to be inclusive, the political nature of developing an accountability system often leads to divisiveness, finger-pointing, and blame. As a result, policy maker's decisions appear to ignore input from those most directly affected (educator preparation programs), who view the policies as top-down. Even in the best of scenarios, the implementation of the state-imposed accountability system will, in fact, be top-down because it is a shift from the self-regulating system.

The preparation for the state imposition of a performance system will require an internal review of each program to ensure that the program is addressing the performance indicators. In essence, each institution must align its curriculum with the performance indicators or risk adverse program review.

As a result of the imposition of an accountability system, the media is likely to scrutinize each institution's performance on the identified indicators. It would be wise for each institution to develop a public relations plan in advance to help direct the *spin* of the consequent media reports. In extreme cases, a damage control plan may also be necessary.

Discussion

Because the accountability systems have not been in place long enough to produce results, data that indicate effectiveness or impact of these systems are scarce at best.[8] Policy makers may be faced with policy decisions that maintain an adequate supply of teachers at the expense of an effective accountability system. Hess (1999) when writing about local, urban policy makers states that

> Most research on school governance implicitly assumes that educational policy makers are single-mindedly pursuing maximum educational performance. However, … [policy makers] face institutional pressures to win and maintain popular support. .The need to attract this support creates an incentive to favor policies that will generate a positive reaction in the professional and local communities and that will alienate as few people as possible. (p. 459)

Many states struggle to fill numerous teaching vacancies on an annual basis (Olson, 2000). Each year, Texas requires approximately 9,000 more teachers than the state can produce or recruit from the outside. Anticipated retirements in the coming decade, along with a rapid growth in the student population will create an even greater need for teachers (Southworth, 2000). In response to the new accountability systems, teacher preparation programs will likely increase entrance requirements and raise program expectations in order to meet the rigorous standards. Program modifications of this type will only intensify the teacher shortage in demand states like Texas. Indeed, with the absence of a concerted effort to recruit new talent into the profession, the shortage will become acute. Policy makers must address these implementation issues as they address "constituency pressures, resource constraints, an unstable policy environment, [and] a lack of public understanding" (Elmore et al., 1996, p. 85).

Tangential to the accountability system issue is that of national accreditation. In light of the advent of these new systems, NCATE has aggressively initiated state-NCATE partnerships to assist institutions that must meet the increased demands of state requirements. Understandably, some institutions will forego national accreditation to concentrate on the more compelling concern of state accreditation.

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[1] Historically colleges of education have attempted to hold themselves accountable by adhering to a set of standards developed via regional or national accrediting agencies, e.g., NCATE. Throughout this paper the terms "accountability" and "accountability systems" refer to an external process involving measurement from a regulating body. The regulating body is typically a state agency with the authority to allow an institution to credential, or certify, educators for the state. The reader may also note that standards-based accountability, and performance-based accountability are also used to describe similar systems.

[2] The author is aware that this model portrays the educational process as a "closed" system, where extraneous factors do not affect the output. It should be noted, however, that policy makers often view the educational process in this manner.

[3] The accountability system discussed in this paper may be characterized by a shift from a "process-orientation" to a "product-orientation." For example, the "process-orientation" is much more concerned with semester credit hours taken by a prospective educator where the "product-orientation" is much more concerned with the performance of the prospective educator on an identified performance indicator.

[4] Mayer (1999) suggests caution in using data as is currently collected. He suggests that future research should explore ways to enhance the reliability and validity of the data collected.

[5] Elmore et al. (1996) envisioned instances of this nature. They state that "one would expect the existing array of political interests to have difficulty adjusting to a new distribution of expectations, power, and authority" (p. 85).

[6] See Zumeta's (1998, p. 15) discussion on the implementation considerations of performance measures in higher education.

[7] Elmore et al. (1996) discussions regarding public school sanctions noted that "with respect to sanctions, the ultimate punishment for failure of accreditation in the past was loss of state aid, a step rarely taken" (p. 67). However, the new accountability system focuses on a series of intervention steps which may eventually lead to a state take over.

[8] See Linn's (2000, p. 13) discussions regarding the validity, impact, and credibility of standardized tests on improving instruction.